

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 0402

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, DM
SUBJ: DRAFT HUMAJ RIGHTS ACTION PLAN FOR BENIN

REF: A. STATE 66523 B. STATE 57636

WE ARE SUBMITTING HERewith SUGGESTED CHANGES TO DRAFT HUMAN RIGHTS ACTION PLAN SUBMITTED REF B.

1. COUNTRY OVERVIEW:

QUOTE BENIN (FORMERLY DAHOMEY) IS A SMALL COUNTRY LACKING ANY SIGNIFICANT NATURAL RESOURCES. A MAJORITY OF ITS POPULATION OF APPROXIMATELY THREE MILLION LIVES ON SUBSISTANCE AGRICULTURE, AND IN 1976 HAD AN ESTIMATED GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT OF DOLS 137 PER CAPITA. SINCE ITS INDEPENDENCE FROM FRANCE IN 1960, DAHOMEY/ BENIN HAS SUFFERED FROM POLITICAL INSTABILITY, WITH THE COUNTRY HAVING HELD THE RECORD FOR BLOODLESS COUPS D'ETZW.

2. IN OCTOBER 1972, IN AN EFFORT TO BRING STABILITY TO THE FAC- TION/TORN COUNTRY, A GROUP OF MIDDLE-GRADE MILITARY OFFICERS, LED BY LT. COL. MATHIEU KEREKOU, SEIZED POWER AND SET UP A MILITARY REGIME. SINCE THEN, THE KEREKOU REGIME -- THE LONGEST TO HOLD POWER IN BENIN'S POST-INDENENDENCE HISTORY -- OFFICIALLY ADOPTED THE PRINCIPLES OF SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM AND MARXIST-LENING

ISM AS ITS GUIDING PHILOSOPHY (1974) AND CHANGED THE COUNTRY'S
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NAME TO BENIN (1975).

3. THE DEOPTION OF MARXISM-LEMJNISM BY THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BENIN (GPRB) HAS BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY THE STRENGTHENING OF TIES WITH "PROGRESSIVE" SOCIALIST COUNTRIES. THE SOVIET UNION, N. KOREA AND CUBA HAVE PRE-EMPTED FRANCE'S PRIMACY AS THE PRINCIPLE EXTERNAL POLITICAL FORCE, THOUGH BENIN

STILL RELIES HEAVILY ON FRANCE AND OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES FOR ECONOMIC SUPPORT. THE OFFICIAL MEDIA CARRY REGULAR PLACEMENTS BY THE SOVIET NOVOSTII PRESS AGENCY, AND MOST OF THE MARXIST-LENINIST SLOGANS AND PROPAGANDA ARE PROVIDED BY THE SOVIET UNION AND N. KOREA. IN INTERNATIONAL GATHERINGS BENIN HAS UPHELD THE MOST RADICAL OF THIRD WORLD POSITIONS, HRND CAN BE COUNTED ON TO SUPPORT SOVIET AND N. KOREAN POSITIONS ON KEY INTERNATIONAL ISSUES.

4. DOMESTICALLY, THE MARXIST-LENINIST "REVOLUTION" HAS PROCEEDED SLOWELY AND WITH ONLY LIMITED SUCCESS. DESPITE THE REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST RHETORIA,

THE GPRB HAS BEEN UNABLE TO ELIMINATE THE PRIVATE SECTOR -- COTONOU HAS A THRIVING MARKET AND SEVERAL FRENCH AND BRITISH FIRMS CONTINUE TO DO BUSINESS THERE -- NOR HAS IT SUCCEEDED IN ALTERING THE TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURAL STRUCTURE. THROUGH A COMBINATION OF POOR MANAGEMENT AND BAD WEATHER, AN INDEOLOGICALLY CORRECT NATIONAL FOOD PRODUCTION CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED IN DEC 1975 HAS YET TO SHOW POSITIVE RESULTS. RECENTLY THE GOVERNMENT HAS PREFERRED NOT TO INTERVENE IN THE PRICING MECHANISM, MLPARENTLY IN AN EFFORT NOT TO DRIVE FOOD ONTO THE BLACK MARKET, AS OCCURRED IN 1976 AND 77.

5. A MAJOR COMPLICATING FACTOR IN BENIN'S INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT WAS AN ABORTIVE MERCENARY ATTACK ON JAN 16, 1977. THE ATTACK, ALLEGEDLY ORGANIZED BY DAHOMEAN DISSIDENTS ABROAD, PROVIDED CONFIDENTIAL

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THE GPRB WITH A RATIONALE FOR CREATING A STATE OF EMERGENCY ENABLING IT TO CARRY OUT ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND TAKE OTHER MEASURES IN THE NAME OF PROTECTING THE REVOLUTION. MANY OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS ARE STILL INFLUENCED BY A "MERCENARY PSYCHOSIS" WHICH CONTINUES TO SPAWN FEARS THAT BENIN WILL SOON BE ATTACKED BY OUTSIDE FORCES.

6. THIS ENVIRONMENT HAS SHAPED THE REGIME'S ATTITUDES TOWARD HUMAN RIGHTS. ALTHOUGH A NEW CONSTITUTION, PROMULGATED IN AUG 1977 BUT AS YET UNIMPLEMENTED, PROVIDES FOR MANY INDIVIDUAL FREEDOMS, INDIVIDUAL HUMAN RIGHTS ARE CONSIDERED SECONDARY TO WIDER SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC WELFARE AND TO PROTECTING THE COUNTRY FROM REAL OR PERCEIVED THREATS. CIVIL AND POLITICAL LIBERTIES ARE TO BE EXERCISED UNDER THE ENLIGHTENED GUIDANCE OF THE OFFICIAL PARTY. EMPHASIS IS PLACED ON FULFILLMENT OF VITAL ECONOMIC NEEDS AND "CORRECT" ADMINISTRATION OF GOVERNMENT. NEVERTHELESS, ALTHOUGH IT HAS SUPPRESSED VARIOUS FREEDOMS, THE GOVERNMENT BELIEVES THAT IT IS WORKING FOR THE BEST INTERESTS OF ITS PEOPLE, AND IS THEREFORE SENSITIVE TO CRITICISM OF ITS HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD IN INTERNATIONAL COUNCILS. UNQUOTE.

7. THE LAST PARAGRAPH OF SECTION 2, REF B REFERS TO "GOALS".

WHILE THE PRECEDING PARAGRAPH MENTIONS ONLY A PRIMARY GOAL AND THE EFFORTS WE ARE MAKING TO REACH IT. WE SUGGEST THAT THE LAST PARA OF SECTION 2 BE ALTERED TO READ,

"ALTHOUGH WE HAVE SUCCEEDED IN MAINTAINING A RELATIVELY CORDIAN

WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GPRB, HAVE REGISTERED MODEST SUCCESS IN INFORMATIONAL AND CULTURAL PROGRAMS AND HAVE PERSUADED THE BENINESE TO AGREE IN PRINCIPLE TO COMPENSATION TO JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES, OUR PROGRESS OTHERWISE HAS BEEN MINIMAL. OUR MAJOR SUCCESS HAS BEEN IN AVOIDING ANY FURTHER DETERIORATION IN OUR RELATIONS. UNQUOTE.

8. IN SECTION 3, "INTERGRITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL", IS A CONFUSING
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EXPRESSION. WE SUGGEST THAT A PHRASE SUCH AS "INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY" BE USED INSTEAD.

9. IN SEC 3, PART B, WE SUGGEST THAT TEXT BE MODIFIED WHERE APPROPRIATE TO READ " CONTINUE TO INSTRUCT THE EMBASSY, ETC." SUCH INSTRUCTIONS ARE NOT A NEW INITIATIVE, AS DRAFT REPORT MIGHT OTHERWISE IMPLY. THOMPSON

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